

RACHEL KOWERT, PhD

Facilitating global policy and product development with non-profit, governmental, and non-governmental agencies for 15+ years through data-driven research focused on mental health and trust and safety in digital games

CONTACT



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Ontario, Canada

EDUCATION

University of York | 2014
PhD, Psychology

Santa Clara University | 2008
MA, Counselling Psychology

University of Texas, Dallas | 2005
BA, Psychology

AWARDS

Global Community Award | 2024
Finalist

Hermes Gold Award | 2021
Winner, Communications Pandemic Response

Telly Award | 2021
Winner, Branded Content Campaign

GDC Best Presentation Award | 2020
Winner, for the talk "Changing the 'games are bad' narrative"

CAREER HIGHLIGHTS

- **Internationally-recognized Subject Matter Expert for mental health and games**, including topics relating to addiction, violence, and parenting in the digital age.
- **Groundbreaking the field of games and extremism** as Primary Investigator on the first project examining this intersection funded by the Department of Homeland Security.
- **Internationally-recognized research portfolio**, 100+ scientific publications in outlets such as Cyberpsychology, Behavior, and Social Networking, Computers in Human Behavior, and Frontiers in Psychology
- **Prominent media figure**, with 100+ appearances across national and international outlets, such as NBC, CBC, NPR, New York Times, Washington Post, Wired Magazine, Wall Street Journal, and The Atlantic.
- **Invited speaker** for the United Nations, US State Department and members of US Congress to speak about mental health and trust and safety challenges in gaming spaces

LEADERSHIP

- **Established the research department at Take This and served as its first Research Director.**
 - Developed, managed, and fundraised 1M+ research portfolio, including day-to-day operational and management processes. Worked with the team to distil learnings and feed them into future strategy and grantmaking decisions.
 - Stakeholder management across sectors (tech, academic, governmental and NGO) around issues relating to mental health, digital safety and digital literacy.
- **Influential voice around issues relating to trust and safety and digital technology**, consulting with policy stakeholders on emerging regulatory issues, with groups such as the United Nations, US State Department, Christchurch Call, UK Office of Communications (Ofcom), Public Safety Canada, Electronic Software Association (ESA), UK Interactive Entertainment (UKIE), Global Internet Forum to Counter Terrorism (GIFCT)
 - Consulted with members of Ofcom on issues of stakeholder management in relation to the implementation of the Online Safety Act in game and game adjacent spaces
 - Briefed US policymakers and government agencies to better prioritise legislative efforts around trust and safety regulation in online gaming spaces
- **Keynote, panellist, guest speaker** at events hosted by United Nations, Sesame Workshop, ESA, and VOX Pol, and conferences such as SXSW, GDC, G4C, National Communication Association (NCA), and Something Digital Festival.
- **Mentored academic and industry professionals** ranging from junior to senior in expertise, providing career coaching, research consultation, and general mentorship. This includes serving as external supervisor and external examiner for several PhD projects.
- **Guest lecturer** for more than a dozen universities, including American University, New York University, University of California Irvine, Purdue, University of Pennsylvania, University of York, Fielding University, and Ohio Northern University

STRATEGY

- **10+ years' experience serving on private and public sector advisory committees and boards**, including United Nations Global Mental Health Task Force, GIFCT, Extremism in Games Research Network (EGRN), Raising Good Gamers (Games for Change), Mental Health Foundation (UK), and Center for Doctoral Training in Intelligent Games and Game Intelligence (iGGI) at University of York
 - Led a needs assessment and development of best practice guidelines for policy in gaming spaces to address the terrorism and violent extremism for GIFCT. This included project development, stakeholder management, report drafting and presenting.
 - Developed strategic partnerships to build organisational expertise and growth for iGGI initiatives through cross-sector engagement between the gaming industry, academia, and non-profit stakeholders.
- **Contributed to strategy, development, and execution for a research portfolio of more than \$4M**, including projects funded by Horizon Europe Research and Innovation Action, Department of Homeland Security, and Canadian Resiliency Fund.

FEATURED PRESS

[Extremism in Gaming Spaces](#) | 2024
Bellingcat

[Are video games saving or ruining kids' minds?](#) | 2024
SMORE Science

[Meet the Psychologist Determined to Prove Video Games are Good, Actually](#) | 2023
Kotaku

[Video Games that Encourage Human Interaction Can Build Better Vibes](#) | 2023
Wired

[Gaming & Extremism: Identity Fusion](#) | 2023
Tech Against Terrorism

[Toxicity and the bottom line](#) | 2022
NBC News Now

[The Metaverse's Effects on Mental Health: Trivial or Troubling](#) | 2022
The Wall Street Journal

[A time bomb 'supercharged' by the pandemic: How white nationalists are using gaming to recruit for terror](#) | 2022
Independent

[DHS to spend almost \\$700,000 investigating radicalization in gaming](#) | 2022
Vice

[Dangerous Game? China forces out Fortnite amid tighter gaming controls](#) | 2021
France 24

[A Parent's Guide to Video Games](#) | 2020
The Mental Mile

- Including grant writing, the development of research frameworks, project development (including budgets), implementation, analysis, presentation of findings, and project management (including workflow development).
- **Collaborated with a range of policy stakeholders for digital wellness initiatives and digital regulation** with governmental and NGO groups, including the US Congress, OFCOM, Digital Wellness Lab at Harvard, Stanford Center for Youth Mental and Well Being, Mental Health Foundation (UK), Roblox, and Ubisoft.
 - Key contributor to the Roblox and Boston Children's Digital Wellness Lab initiative, generating best practices around social behaviour in online gaming spaces
- **Worked closely with legal, product, and executive teams** to design and deliver collaborative projects across public, private, and government organisations. Partners include, Allianz, Nielsen, Entertainment Software Ratings Board (ESRB), Modulate, Ubisoft, Roblox, and k-ID.
 - Produced a global communication campaign about online safety and the metaverse for Allianz for their 125M customer base across 70 countries.
 - Provided subject matter expertise to help identify, monitor, prioritise policy trends in relation to online safety and mental wellness for members of US Congress, Department of Homeland Security, and US State Department
 - Curated strategic relationships with industry partners to amplify research and advocacy around trust and safety in gaming spaces, including a series of white-papers co-developed with industry partners including Nielsen and Modulate
- **Fostered strategic collaborations with university partners**, including The University of Cambridge, New York University, The University of Texas, Concordia University, and The University of York.

PROGRAM DEVELOPMENT AND MANAGEMENT

- **Founded Psychgeist**, a multimedia content production studio for the intersection of science and games, which includes *Psychgeist* YouTube channel (200+ videos), *Most Recent Save* podcast, and *The Psychgeist of Pop Culture* book series (20-book deal) published by ETC Press.
- **Consulted, designed, and/or executed on 100+ projects** on topics relating to mental health, digital literacy, and uses and effects of games.
 - Strategic partner in a global communication campaign with ESRB
- **Developed and administered 100+ workshops** in university, public, and online settings. Workshop topics include hate and harassment of game makers, video game effects, and inclusive design.
- **Developed and managed a team of 150+ authors and 15+ editors** for the *Psychgeist of Pop Culture* book series
- **Co-designed, facilitated, and participated in engagement events** alongside key community partners, including ActiveFence, Modulate, and Keywords Studios.
 - Key partner in establishing and launching the Gaming Safety Coalition in 2024, which aims to establish new benchmarks in content moderation, technological innovation, and mental health advocacy.
- **Founding editor ACM games research and practice**. Responsible for developing the publication pipeline, project management, and communication with authors for quarterly publication of viewpoint articles.

BOARDS & COMMITTEES

GIFCT Gaming Community of Practice
2024 - Present
Output lead

UN Global Mental Health Task Force
2024 - Present
Advisory Member

Extremism in Games Research
Network (EGRN)
2024 - Present
Vice President

Raising Good Gamers
2020 - Present
Board Member

VR Eval
2023 - Present
Scientific Advisory Board

Mental Health Foundation (UK)
2022 - Present
Advisory Member

SELECT PUBLICATIONS

- [Gaming and Extremism \(Routledge\) | 2024](#)
- [Toxicity and the bottom line \(Take This\)| 2024](#)
- [Toxic games are alienating your core demographic \(Take This\) | 2023](#)
- [Digital Games and Mental Health \(Frontiers\) | 2021](#)
- [The Video Game Debate 2 \(Routledge\) | 2020](#)
- [Dark Participation in Games \(Frontiers\)| 2021](#)
- [Video Games and Well-Being \(Springer\) | 2020](#)
- [The Video Game Debate \(Routledge\) | 2016](#)

SELECT WORK EXPERIENCE

Take This | 2019 - 2024

RESEARCH DIRECTOR

- **Founded, developed, and led the Research Department of the organisation** from 2019 - 2024. Fundraised and oversaw \$1M+ research portfolio and ran day-to-day operational and management processes. Worked with the larger team to distil learnings and feed them into future strategy and grantmaking decisions.
 - Created project plans ranging from 3 to 24 months, including development of project timelines, deliverables, and dissemination plans.
- **Developed and supported community projects and partnerships**, including administration and logistics, with external stakeholders such as Anti-Defamation League (ADL), GamerSafer, International Game Developers Association (IGDA), Modulate, Nielsen, and Safe in Our World.
- **Consulted with and led workshops** for industry partners including Activision/Blizzard, Bethesda, Double Fine, Electronic Arts, Innersloth, Iron Galaxy, Keywords Studios, Microsoft Gaming/XBox, Mojang, Niantic, Riot, Roblox, Sony, and Ubisoft.
- **Developed and led advocacy campaigns** as part of Raising Good Gamers initiative with Games for Change

Independent Consulting | 2014 -PRESENT

- **Project consultation and support.** Created project plans by defining scope, identifying deliverables, and setting project milestones for a range of research projects and content collaborations. Examples of this work include:
 - **Project lead** for ISGA annual global report for organisational members. Including the analysis, drafting, and creation of the final summative report.
 - **Project consultant** for Gaming Ecosystems as a Multi-Layered Threat (GEMS) project funded by HORIZON EU grant. Consultation on research pipelines, best practices for assessment approaches, and communication strategy.
 - **Project consultant** for Socialization as a Nexus for Radicalization funded by Canadian Resiliency Fund grant. Contributed to grant proposal, assessment and analysis approaches, technical writing, and communication strategy
 - **Project lead** Gaming as a Community of Practice working group funded by GIFCT. Lead strategy and approaches for summative report and communication strategy.
- **Subject-Matter Expert consultant** for Fortune 50 and Fortune 500 companies. Consulted on issues relating to digital well-being and consumer safety. This has included drafting expert opinion reports for litigation.
- **SME Brand collaborations.** Worked together with brands to create content and communication strategy. Clients include Allianz, Curry PC world, k-ID, Dark Crystal Games, and Tales of Us.

FELLOWSHIPS

RESEARCH FELLOW | 2024

UNIVERSITY OF MUENSTER, CENTER FOR DIGITISED SOCIETIES

HONORARY VISITING PROFESSOR | 2023 - PRESENT

UNIVERSITY OF YORK, DEPARTMENT OF COMPUTER SCIENCE